Digital Word-of-Mouth and the Gender Implications

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**ABSTRACT**

Consumers can now easily access data and exchange sentiments regarding products and services on an unprecedented scale, and often in real time, through digital connections. The Internet and mobile technologies have made sharing of information and opinions among consumers easier than ever. The capacity of online participants to inspire and transform perspectives has been touted to surpass the radical potency of television when it entered the consumer’s province during the 50’s. Men and women use social media sites to learn about new products, to become smarter shoppers and to feel good about a purchase they might have already made. College students are so driven to continuously connect that they chain themselves to the technology 24/7. As digital natives, they are so thoroughly immersed in the process that they possess an indigenous aptitude to operate and fully function within the techno world.

Marketers have long recognized the prominent role that word-of-mouth communication (WOM) played in the consumer decision-making process. However, in recent years, interest has grown with the expansion in the number and types of communication channels offered by new technologies. Online WOM has established itself as a central element in the lives of consumers. In the view of many, the power of social media and online digital WOM communications outstrips the ability of companies to shape their own messages through either traditional communication means or by way of their own social media initiatives. Common wisdom now holds that companies that ignore consumer-to-consumer information posted about their business and products do so at their own peril.

This study explored the implication of gender on the use of digital WOM along with specific online behavior characteristics and purchase variances of male and female digital activities. Research findings suggest the identification of primary digital WOM leaders as revealed through purchase behavior, shopping experience, purchase confidence and innovative online conduct. The concept that “tie-strength” is an indicator of the importance of a moderator’s impact on consumer purchase decisions (Brown & Reingen 1987) may be shifting in regard to online digital WOM. This study indicates that respondents were neutral in regard to the usefulness of online digital WOM compared to friends and family. While online was not deemed as more useful, the neutrality indicates that more research needs to be done on the concept of tie-strength as well as outside indicators of online digital WOM credibility.
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